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ABSTRACT

Since its beginnings in 1970, a field-based teacher education program aimed at preparing certificated Alaska native teachers has graduated 80 teachers. Until then, the University of Alaska's teacher training program had been a traditional campus-based program aimed primarily at preparing teachers for urban schools, with no course that reflected the unique cross-cultural conditions of Alaska's rural schools. As a result, nearly all teachers for rural schools were recruited from outside Alaska, with an accompanying annual turnover rate of 30-40%. The new program's unusual origins allowed it to be viewed as experimental and permitted the open-endedness of a "field" situation and a process-oriented approach. It seemed best to work closely with students and communities and to gradually develop a model that sought to build upon students' characteristics, rather than to impose an external set of expectations. The program now operates as a branch of the School of Education. Other programs have also been implemented in a diversified approach that assists native communities to put the school system to work in their behalf and makes professional control a reality. The paper is the personal narrative of an anthropologist who reflects upon his work experiences in a culturally complex and diverse setting. (BRR)

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Paper presented at the 81st Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, December 3-7, 1982, Washington, D. C.

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Anthropology and the Training of Alaska-Native Teachers

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My education began in 1970 when, having just completed graduate school, I took a position with the University of Alaska as the statewide academic coordinator for a new field-based teacher education program aimed at preparing native teachers to teach in Alaska's rural schools. With a fresh Ph.D. in anthropology and educational administration in hand, and experience as a teacher and researcher in cross-cultural settings on my resume, I considered myself well prepared for the task ahead of me, and assumed that my expertise would be readily apparent and appreciated in the hinterlands of Alaska. I was wrong on both counts. I was not prepared to deal with the institutional inertia that had to be overcome or the advocacy role that my new job entailed. Nor was my expertise in cross-cultural affairs taken for granted. In a setting that has served as a rotational proving ground for numerous imported "instant experts," I was just one more outsider to be regarded with suspicion until my tenure was established and my motives made clear.

In the subsequent eleven years, I have participated at a number of levels in the educational affairs of Alaska, with an emphasis on finding ways to make institutional accommodations to better address the social and educational needs of the State's culturally diverse population. While my motives may still be subject to suspicion, I have accrued sufficient longevity to be able to speak with first-hand authoritative historical hindsight about major educational policy developments in Alaska over the past decade. I will concentrate here on one of those developments and try to show how it was (is)

related to the teaching, research, and program development efforts in which I have been engaged through the University of Alaska, and how anthropology has contributed to those efforts.

With approximately one-fifth of Alaska's population being of indigenous Eskimo, Indian or Aleut background, and with the schools' historical difficulties in providing adequate services to native Americans, it is no surprise that the control and delivery of educational services for Alaska natives has been a major general policy issue in the state during the past ten years. While Alaska natives, through legislative and legal action, achieved a significant measure of political control over their schools in recent years, this alone did not guarantee that the net effect of the educational system on their children would be any different. As one native leader put it, following the creation of a new locally-controlled school district:

> Today, we have control over our educational system. We must now begin to assess whether or not our school system is truly becoming an Inupiat school system, reflecting Inupiat educational philosophies, or, are we in fact only theoretically exercising "political control" over an educational system that continues to transmit white urban culture? Political control over our schools must include "professional control" as well, if our academic institutions are to become an Inupiat school system able to transmit our Inupiat traditional values and ideals (Hopson, 1977).

It is to the issue of "professional control" that I have addressed my efforts as a broker and advocate in an institution responsible for preparing the professionals that staff the schools. The teacher training program offered at the University had been a traditional campus-based program aimed primarily at preparing teachers for the urban schools of Fairbanks or Anchorage, without a single course that reflected the unique cross-cultural conditions of Alaska's rural schools. As a result, nearly all of the teachers for rural schools were recruited from outside the State, with an accompanying

annual turnover rate of 30-40 percent. To combat this problem, a series of federal grants were obtained in 1970 by the then State-Operated School System to contract with the two universities in the State (University of Alaska and Alaska Methodist University) to establish a field-based teacher education program aimed at preparing certificated Alaska native teachers. With significant funding available as an inducement, and under increasing political pressure from the native population, the University of Alaska entered into the contract and I was hired to implement it.

Since the incentive for the program did not originate from within the University, there was little institutional preparation for the significant accommodations that would be necessary to deliver a four-year degree program to students spread across the entire State. In addition, there were varied opinions amongst some of the key participants as to the purposes of the program and how those purposes were to be achieved. It was at this point that my anthropology background, along with that of my counterparts at AMU, began to play a role in the development of the program. The fact that the program was not fully integrated into the institution and that its purposes were somewhat vague provided certain advantages, if those of us implementing it could tolerate the ambiguity that such conditions presented. For my part, I felt quite comfortable with the open-endedness of such a "field" situation and preferred the process-oriented approach that it fostered. Having no preconceived models and little prior experience to build upon for training native teachers, it seemed best to work closely with the students and communities and gradually develop an emic model that sought to build upon the characteristics the students already possessed, rather than impose an external set of expectations regarding the appropriate behavior necessary for someone to be labelled a teacher. This approach to program development ran directly

contrary to the prevailing tide of the day, which sought to establish a prescriptive list of generalized teaching "competencies," formulated in terms of measurable "behavioral objectives," that would lend themselves to public accountability for teacher education programs. One of our functions as program staff, therefore, was to run interference and establish a credible argument for a program that operated on the credo, "We'll know where we are going when we get there." To accomplish this, we drew heavily on the emerging literature from "anthropology and education" and sponsored numerous symposia and workshops that brought in established anthropological researchers and scholars (e.g., John Collier, Harry Wolcott, Fred Erickson) to lend credibility to our efforts. The same perspectives were infused into the training program itself through the selection of anthropologically trained staff and the development of courses that presented material in a cross-cultural perspective.

While my training had prepared me to understand, or at least appreciate, the cross-cultural adjustments that the native students faced in becoming teachers, it had not adequately prepared me to understand the ethnocentric nature of bureaucratic institutions, such as public schools and universities. This I had to learn from experience. Since one of our goals was to minimize the cultural adjustments required of the native students by making institutional adjustments that accommodated to the geographical and cultural characteristics existing in rural Alaska, we established a posture as an "experimental" program. Under such a label, we had latitude to experiment and establish new approaches without having to go through a lot of prior justification. We approached the change process in an incremental fashion. By introducing programmatic changes in stages, where each step was only a small departure from what had already become established practice, we were able to

eventually, over a ten year period, build the program into the University system to the point where it now operates as a branch of the School of Education with its own staff, cross-cultural degree program, and funding. In the meantime we have graduated 80 teachers, most of whom are native, and are now offering a cross-cultural master's program and have initiated a native administrator training program.

While the number of native teachers is small in proportion to the total number of teachers in Alaska, their impact on the students, their commitment to the communities in which they work, and their increased longevity, give them strength beyond their numbers. But increasing the number of native teachers is only one component of what has become a more diversified approach to assisting native communities in putting the school system to work in their behalf and making professional control a reality.

For example, through the support and cooperation of graduates from the program and a National Institute of Education grant, we have been applying recently developed anthropological research techniques and concepts to identify the underlying features that distinguish a native teacher's classroom from that of a non-native teacher. If initial evidence is substantiated, it will have considerable implications for teacher training, selection and placement, and for the very structure of schooling in cross-cultural settings.

In another research effort, following the establishment of over 100 new small high schools in rural Alaska in 1976, we developed, in cooperation with the Department of Education, a program in which we placed graduate students from our cross-cultural program in communities in which undergraduates were located, and assisted them in conducting fieldwork to obtain the communities' perspective regarding the establishment of a local high school program. This

information was then compiled into a report outlining communities' concerns regarding secondary education for their children, and offering some guidelines regarding the curriculum and teacher training needs of the new schools. Having concentrated on obtaining the communities' perspective at the local level, we had neglected, however, to attend to the statewide political perspectives on the issue, and found our attempts to identify and address the problems associated with the development of the small high schools picked up by the urban-based opposition and used to argue against their very existence. Again, having not been prepared to deal with either micro or macro level politics, I found myself playing in a game for which I didn't know the rules. Policy issues are often being negotiated at several levels, and being an expert at one level may or may not mean anything at another level. In this case, the small high schools survived and many of our recommendations are being implemented, but I now have a much better appreciation of political processes and my own limitations in that arena.

My efforts as an institutional advocate on behalf of native educational issues, however, have not always met with success. As a member of a State task force on teacher certification, I teamed up with other members representing native interests and we sought to make some changes in requirements that would address some of the constraints placed on native teachers and rural schools. While we were able to obtain majority support for our arguments in the rational forum of the task force meetings, the teachers' union quickly scuttled the whole package when it was moved into the political arena of public hearings and legislative action. While my training wasn't intended to prepare me to deal with power politics, anyone that expects to get involved in any kind of advocacy role on policy issues, beyond serving as a

passive expert witness, must recognize the political dimensions of that role. Traditional training in anthropology will not suffice when political action is involved.

Cross-Cultural education issues in Alaska cannot be adequately addressed from an academic purist position. The population is too small and the institutions too new for anthropologists or anyone else to isolate themselves from the effects of their work. And one's work, unless it is of a basic nature, will not be of much value in improving the quality of life in the state if it is not grounded in the multiple realities of the State's culturally complex and diverse setting. Since many of the institutions in the state are still in an emergent form, anthropologists can play an important role in shaping those institutions to be more accommodating to the diverse needs of the populations they serve. Nowhere are the opportunities and needs for such a role greater than in the formation of the institutions of formal education and the policies that govern them. Working in such an environment, however, requires special skills and tolerances to deflect the special pressures generated "where the rubber meets the road."

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